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On the Origins of the  
Feast of the Conception  
of the Blessed  
Virgin Mary . . . .

BY

EDMUND BISHOP

BURNS & OATES LIMITED

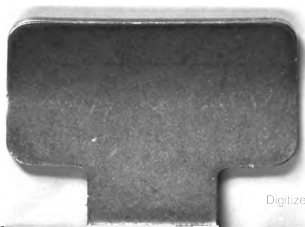
28 ORCHARD STREET, LONDON, W.

1904

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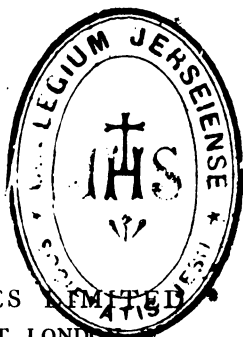


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# On the Origins of the Feast of the Concep- tion of the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . .

BY

EDMUND BISHOP



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28 ORCHARD STREET, LONDON, W

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## Prefatory Note

THE following paper originally appeared in the pages of *The Downside Review* in April 1886. Its object was to call the attention of ecclesiastical writers to facts connected with the origin of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception which had hitherto escaped notice and would be sought for in vain in the weighty volumes of Passaglia, the collection of "Monuments" of Ballerini, or in the late Father Harper's more popular but solid work, entitled *Peace through the Truth*. The information it afforded has by this time become one of the commonplaces of the subject. It has, therefore, done its destined work; and recognition is now general of the fact that the well-spring of the Marian devotion, which, spreading over the Church, issued at last in the Definition of 1854, is of

be found in the simple piety of English hearts some nine hundred years ago. But it has been considered by the publishers that the original article may, in the circumstances, be fitly reprinted as a memorial of the present Jubilee.

I take advantage of the occasion to make a few brief remarks by way of correction on one point. At p. 38 n. it is stated that the celebration of the feast of 8th December at the close of the ninth century at Naples "is a mere isolated appearance; it was not a living germ." Not merely does this assertion appear too absolute, but it now seems to me probable that the feast was actually introduced into England from Lower Italy. Strange as this might seem at first sight it is not more strange than the influence of Italo-Byzantine art at Winchester (seemingly about the same time), to which Sir E. M. Thompson has called attention. If this be the case the Feast of the Conception would range with the feasts of the Blessed

Virgin introduced into the West from Constantinople two centuries earlier ; for it is but reasonable to suppose that its occurrence at Naples is to be referred to the similar feast witnessed to by the earliest of the Greek ritual books, called *Typica*, recently published. On the other hand, I am disposed to think that the feast in May, occurring in some Irish documents to which Father Thurston has lately called attention, is not the source of the feast of 8th December at Winchester. It is true that in the tenth century, and early in the eleventh, the English Church was greatly open to foreign influences. It is true, too, that in the early decades of the tenth century some Irish pilgrims are found settled at deserted Glastonbury. But of Irishry in the great ecclesiastical movement that ensued, and least of all in Dunstan, it is difficult to descry traces ; it was the Continent, not Ireland, to which men looked, from which they derived inspiration. The Irish feast of May (if, indeed, such



a feast were ever actually observed) stands alone, and outside the lines of liturgical development. To it, therefore, I should be disposed to apply the words used in the note, and say: "It is a mere isolated appearance; it was not a living germ."

As a layman I have been careful to avoid the theological aspect of the documents adduced. This has been considered quite recently by—*e.g.* Father Thurston in *The Month* and by Père Noyon in the Paris *Etudes* of the FF. of the Society of Jesus. But these pages may, perhaps, here or there fall under the eye of a reader who will find in the present case an illustration of what seems almost a law observable in the history of the Church, whereby popular devotion appears as the destined starting-point for dogma, an idea underlying and practically interpreting the old saying: *Lex orandi lex credendi*.

E. B.

7th November 1904.

## On the Origins of the Feast of the Concep- tion of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**A**S is well known, the Provincial Council of Canterbury of the year 1328 attributes the institution of the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin to Saint Anselm, who thought fit, so runs the text, "to add to the more ancient feasts of the Blessed Virgin the solemnity of the Conception." Another document, professing to give a history of its establishment, states that it began at Ramsey, pursuant to a vision vouchsafed to Helsin, Elsi, or Aethelsige, abbot of that monastery, on his journey back from Denmark, whither he had been sent by William I. soon after the Conquest. This

narrative seems to have been known as early as 1140, or thereabout, to Saint Bernard, who in his famous letter to the church of Lyons mentions a "scriptum supernae revelationis," put forth by some persons in support of the new feast; it is also pointed out that in Domesday Book mention is made of the abbot's journey, the fact of which is indubitable. Some time in the twelfth or thirteenth century an attempt was made to reconcile the two accounts by adding a few words at the beginning and end of the narrative, whereby it is made to take the form of a letter addressed by Saint Anselm to the bishops of his province.

The spuriousness of the letter is commonly allowed, though some writers of authority are disposed to credit the narrative. It may be as well to say at once that we do not believe the reported institution of the feast by Saint Anselm, though it may be possible to explain how that idea got abroad, and that we attach no

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credence to the Helsin narrative so far as it relates to the matter in hand, for this reason, among others, that the feast was already established in England before the Conquest, and was in all probability known to Helsin at Canterbury during his abbacy at Saint Augustine's. (For his perplexed history see Freeman, *Norm. Conq.* iv. 135-8, and Append. P.)

The following evidence of the observance of the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin in England in pre-Norman times has come under notice:—

1. In a calendar contained in Cotton MS. Titus D. xxvii. is the entry, in the original hand, at 8th December: "Conceptio sancte Dei genitricis Mariae." The MS. was written in the monastery of Newminster, at Winchester, during the abbacy of Aelfwin, whose obit occurs in another hand at 25th October. Its date, therefore, falls between 1034-57.

2. Another calendar of the Old

Minster, or Cathedral Priory, at Winchester, in Cotton MS. Vitellius E. xviii., has the same entry. The MS. is attributed by Hickes to about the year 1030. The handwriting and the character of the calendar itself fix its date, with all reasonable certainty, before the Conquest.\*

3. Additional MS. 28188 is a pontifical and benedictional of the eleventh century, of which the printed catalogue says : " The name of Aegelfleda (as the only English saint occurring in the second litany) connects the volume with the abbey of Romsey " ; in other words, this is a Winchester pontifical. The benediction for Saint Swithin's Day (" *interventu tanti patroni* ") is not the only further point which might be brought forward in support of its Winchester origin. But we think that this book actually comes from Exeter. Stress, perhaps, must not be laid on the invocations of SS. Neot, Petrock, and German in the

\* Both these calendars are printed by Hampson. *Kal. med. aevi*, i. 433, 446.

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first litany (fol. 3a); but that of Saint Sativola, or Sidwell (fol. 4a), seems decisive. At least, in the course of an examination of a large number of English service books, we have found traces of her cultus outside the diocese of Exeter only in a Norwich martyrology of the fifteenth century and in an addition, in a later hand, to that of Christ Church, Dublin; it is possible such cult may have existed also at Sherborne. The Winchester cast of the book is easily explained. It is well known that copyists of Church books often neglected to adapt the old text to changed circumstances. Bishop Leofric, in providing his new cathedral of Exeter with office books, is known to have used Winchester models, and in the additions to the so-called "Leofric Missal" his scribe has actually left unaltered a text appropriate to Winchester (see *York Pontifical*, ed. Henderson, pp. xxiii.-iv.). What happened in the case of the missal may well have happened with the

pontifical also. We are, therefore, disposed to recognise in Add. MS. 28188 one of the books written for Bishop Leofric, and accordingly to assign it a date—1046-72. At any rate its liturgical character is distinctly pre-Norman, and its original at least is of Winchester. At fol. 161 is the following:—

BENEDICTIO IN CONCEPTIONE  
SANCTE MARIAE

Sempiterna(m) a Deo benedictionem vobis beate Marie virginis pia deponat supplicatio, quam concipiendam Omnipotens, ex qua eius conciperetur Unigenitus, angelico declaravit preconio, quam et vobis jugiter suffragari benigno, ut est benignissima, sentiatis auxilio. Amen.\*

Quique illam ante conceptum pre-signavit nomine \* Spiritus Sancti obumbratione, vos divinam gratiam mente annuat concipere in sancte

\* The angelic annunciation of the Virgin's birth and name is drawn from the *Evangelium de nativitate S. Mariae*, capp. 3-4.

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Trinitatis confessione, atque ab omni malo protectos deifica confirmet sanctificatione. Amen.

Sancta vero Dei genitrix Maria vobis a Deo pacis et gaudii optineat incrementum, ut quibus felix ejusdem beate virginis partus extitit salutis exordium, sit etiam ipse Jesus Christus premium in celis vite permanentis sempiternum.

Quod Ipse prestare dignetur [qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et gloriatur Deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen.

Benedictio Dei Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, et pax Domini sit semper vobiscum].\*

4. Harl. MS. 2892 is also a pontifical and benedictional, written for the cathedral church of Canterbury (the contents afford conclusive evidence of this) after the translation of Saint Elphege (1023), but, to judge

\* The words in brackets are not in the MS., but are added to show the usual ending of these benedictions. Another formula is: "Q. I. pr. d. cujus regnum et imperium sine fine permanet in secula seculorum. Amen. Benedictio," etc.



from the handwriting, in the first half of the eleventh century, and certainly before the Conquest. At ff. 189-90 is :

BENEDICTIO IN DIE CONCEPTIONIS  
SANCTE DEI GENITRICIS MARIE

Caelestium carismatum inspirator  
terrenarumque mentium reparator,  
qui beatam Dei genitricem, angelico  
concipiendam preconavit oraculo,  
vos benedictionum suarum ubertate  
dignetur locupletare et virtutum  
floribus dignanter decorare. Amen.

Et Qui illam prius sanctificavit  
nominis dignitate quam edita gigneretur  
humana fragilitate vos  
virtutum copiis adjuvet pollere, et  
in nominis sui veneranda confessione  
(confessione MS.) infatigabiliter  
perdurare. Amen.

Obtineat vobis gloriosis intercessionibus  
prospera tempora, jocunda  
et pacifica, et post presentia secula  
gaudia sine fine manentia, cujus  
venerande conceptionis frequentamini  
magnifica sacramenta. Amen.

Quod Ipse prestare dignetur.

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Probably a search among manuscripts at Oxford and elsewhere would bring to light further evidence. If the calendar entries stood alone it would be well to hesitate before drawing conclusions; the Episcopal benedictions show that the feast not only commended itself to the devotion of individuals but that it was recognised by authority, and was observed with considerable solemnity. They, moreover, justify us in assuming that, at the time these books were written, its observance was no novelty, but that it had had time to spread and to grow in public esteem. It is to be noted that these benedictions come in the manuscripts immediately after the Feast of Saint Birinus (3 Dec.); the day was, therefore, doubtless that given in the calendars—viz. 8th December.

A few words on the question of the precise place where the feast had its rise—always a difficult matter where rites or ceremonies or liturgical institutions are concerned, for they mostly come in without obser-

vation, and their existence is commonly not recorded until they have obtained an established footing, and have begun to spread. All that can usually be done is to follow the way to which facts seem to point, and in the end a probability, more or less strong, is the utmost that can be arrived at. So, too, in the present case. The Winchester monasteries have occurred in connection with the first three documents quoted above ; the Canterbury benedictional is hardly less a witness for Winchester than these, for it is to be remembered that, from the time of Saint Dunstan to the martyrdom of Saint Elphege, Canterbury was intimately connected with Winchester, as well before the reintroduction of monks into the cathedral monastery by Archbishop Aelfric as after. In the last years of the tenth century both the Winchester houses, which took their cue from Saint Ethelwold, were a busy hive ; the picture has yet to be drawn—and the means for doing so are becoming easier,

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thanks to modern research—of the activity, mental and manual, of which they were the scene: painting, architecture, goldsmiths' work, music, history and grammar, verse-making and homiletics, even science, the vulgar and the learned tongues, were alike cultivated. The so-called *Concordia regularis*, passing under the name of Saint Dunstan, but much more probably the product of a Winchester hand trained in Saint Ethelwold's school, is not only ample witness to the care and thought bestowed on the observance of sacred liturgy and of regular discipline but also evidence of a certain freedom in breaking new ground and innovating in these matters. Witness, for instance, the quasi-dramatic representation of the resurrection in cap. 5, which in later centuries became an integral part of the Easter morning office throughout the churches of northern Europe (and which, by the way, is the starting-point for investigations into the origin of the modern theatre).

The earliest trace of this "office of the resurrection" is in the *Concordia*; perhaps it is not mere accident that one of the oldest examples, if not the very earliest, on the Continent occurs in a manuscript of Saint Martial's at Limoges, some monks of which house had just recently been to Canterbury.\* Be that as it may, this instance of the "sepulchre office" alone betokens a habit of mind which dwelt on and realised and sought, as far as might be, by action to show forth, the

\* See Milchsack, *Oster- und Passionsspiele* (Wolfenbüttel, 1880), pp. 24 and 38-9. For the journey of the monks of Saint Martial's see Alford's *Annales*, 1022, ii.-iv. Another very early example of the same office is afforded by an Einsiedeln consuetudinary, the same apparently which Dom Odilo Ringholz is about to edit in the *Studien und Mittheilungen* of the Austrian Benedictines. Dom Odilo states that this document has striking affinities with the *Concordia regularis*, and he recalls the fact that in the course of the tenth century an Englishman became abbot of Einsiedeln (see *Downside Review*, vol. iv. p. 8). [The text is retained unaltered; but on the subject of the "office of the resurrection" the *Fragmenta Burana* of Professor Wilhelm Meyer (Göttingen, 1902) should now be consulted. 1904.]

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mysteries surrounding the story of our redemption. On the other hand, the Newminster manuscript quoted above is still speaking evidence of the profound devotion of the monks of that house towards the holy Mother of God.\*

The probabilities, therefore, on existing evidence seem to point to this, that the establishment of the feast is due to the monks of Winchester, disciples of Saint Ethelwold.

So much for origins : to proceed to the later history.

Stowe's *Chronicle*, under 1129, states that at the council of London in that year, "by authoritie of the Pope, the Feast of the Conception of our Ladie was confirmed." Stowe's authority is doubtless, either directly or indirectly, the following passage of the Tewkesbury annals, compiled in the thirteenth century † :—"1129.

\* The Titus MS. D. xxvi. is very much like its neighbour, and is not improbably a Newminster MS. also.

† MS. fonds Latin 9376 at the Bibl. Nationale, Paris, is said to contain Tewkes-

Festivitas conceptionis sanctae Mariae in concilio apud Londoniam apostolica auctoritate confirmata est" (ed. Luard, p. 45). Nothing is said of this matter in the contemporary chronicles (*e.g.* Huntingdon's History and the Saxon Chronicle, which both speak of the council at some length); but the letters of Osbert de Clare, a contemporary, give strong reason for thinking that the statement is correct, though probably the words "apostolica auctoritate" will not bear the precise interpretation put upon them by Stowe.

Osbert de Clare was a native of Suffolk, monk, and by-and-by prior, of Westminster. His history is obscure—it need not have been so if he had been content to speak plainly instead of wrapping up his meaning.

bury annals 1066-1149; the MS. seems to be saec. xii (*Neues Archiv*, vi. 478). If this be so there is a chance of getting contemporary authority. [The Paris MS. does not contain the entry; but, in view of the general character of the thirteenth-century monastic annals, this would not necessarily affect the credit due to it. 1904.]

in a cloud of words—but his letters show that he was a man of consequence, and in relation with the most notable personages of his time. With Anselm, abbot of Edmundsbury, nephew of the archbishop, and during the second half of the reign of Henry I. one of the most influential ecclesiastics in England, he was on terms of intimate friendship; on one occasion he overpoweringly addresses the abbot as his “lord, father, guide, protector, refuge, and the angel of his counsel.” But our business is with another letter, also to Abbot Anselm, which after the usual salutations runs thus: “Your sedulous zeal has fired many in various countries with devotion towards the blessed and glorious Mother of God, and by your assiduous care the Feast of her Conception is now in many places observed, which was not wont to be celebrated by the ancient fathers. Wherefore, some followers of Satan, whilst we were keeping this feast, decried its observance as hitherto unheard of



and absurd, and with malicious intent they went to two bishops, Roger (of Salisbury) and Bernard (of St David's), who happened then to be in the neighbourhood, and, representing its novelty, they excited them to displeasure. The bishops declared that the festival was forbidden by a council, and that the observance of it must be stopped. Nevertheless, we proceeded with the office of the day, which had already begun, and carried it through with joyous solemnity. Then some who bore me a grudge, and who, whilst striving to get countenance for their own silly fancies, are busy to bring discredit on both words and deeds of religious men, vomited against me the venom of their iniquity, and shot out upon me the darts of their pestilent tongues, saying that the feast was not to be kept, for its establishment had not the authorisation of the Church of Rome. I refuted them by reason, and answered them according to their malice, and many persons bore witness that, as

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well in this kingdom as across the sea, a festal commemoration of the day has been instituted by some bishops and abbots in their churches." After entering on the reasons for such a feast (a passage of considerable interest, though not necessary for the present purpose) Osbert proceeds to explain that his object in writing is to beg Anselm to confer with religious, lettered, and well-minded persons on the subject, and excite them to a defence of "the cause of the Blessed Virgin." "And since our lord and father Gilbert, by the grace of God bishop of London, a most catholic-minded man, is sufficiently instructed in these matters, and Hugh, abbot of Reading, who at the prayer of King Henry solemnly keeps this festival, is well versed in both sacred and profane learning, I exhort you to discuss the matter with them, and to enlist their co-operation lest you should hear it said of you by your enemies with the word of scorn: 'This man began to build, and could

not finish.' This I say because you have begun the building up of this solemnity, and so do you carry it through, and faithfully accomplish an undertaking which it is incumbent on you to bring to completion. Since you have a thorough practical knowledge of the customs of the Roman Church we beg you to let us know if anything in support of the venerable Conception of the Mother of God is to be drawn from them." Osbert concludes with expressions of his readiness to die, if need be, in her cause.\*

\* Portions of Osbert's letters were edited by Anstruther (Brussels, 1846. 8vo), with those of Herbert de Losinga, etc. The one in question is partially printed, pp. 124-6. The following extracts are material for our purpose ; the words in brackets, not given by Anstruther, are taken from Cott. MS. Vitell. A. xvii. f. 24 *et seq.* :—" Quoniam diligentia sollicitudinis vestre per diversa mundi spacia multos ad amorem beate et gloriose Dei genitricis Marie ferventer accendit, que castis visceribus perpetue virginitatis auctorem celi et terre Christum Dominum concepit et peperit ; et in multis locis celebratur ejus vestra sedulitate festa conceptio, quam antiquitus apud patres veteres celebrare non consuevit christiana religio. Unde in ec-

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This letter suggests several observations. First, its date must be fixed. Gilbert, surnamed the Universal, was consecrated bishop of London at Canterbury on 22nd January, 1128. Hugh, abbot of Reading, was elected archbishop of Rouen in the last days of 1129 or the first of 1130. The letter falls, therefore, in either 1128 or 1129.

The "we" who kept the Feast of

clesia Dei cum a nobis celebris ageretur illius diei festivitas, quidam post sathan abeuntes dixerunt esse ridiculum quod usque ad hec tempora omnibus fuisset seculis inauditum. Et in livore ac felle sue malicie perdurantes duos episcopos qui tunc in vicinio forte aderant Rogerum videlicet et Bernardum adeuntes convenerunt, ac de novitate solennitatis exorta facta relatione animos eorum ad indignationem provocaverunt. Qui hanc festivitatem prohibitam dicentes in concilio affirmaverunt quod cassanda esset nec tenenda ista tradicio. Nos tamen cepto diei insistentes officio cum gaudio gloriosam festivitatem exegimus et solenni tripudio. Postremo vero emuli mei et qui canino dente bona invidentes rodunt aliorum, qui vanas suas ineptias semper nituntur approbare, et dicta et facta religiosorum moliuntur improbare, nescientes secundum apostolum neque que loquuntur neque de quibus affirmant, evomuere venenum iniquitatis sue et in me sagittas lingue

the Conception are, of course, Osbert and the monks of Westminster. Gilbert's predecessor at London died 16th January 1127; the vacancy of the see, it may be presumed, was the reason why Osbert's "emuli" (not improbably they were to be found among the chapter of Saint Paul's, the dean whereof caused no little rub in Abbot Anselm's fortunes later on) addressed themselves to the bishops of Salisbury (the King's most

pestifere jaculantes asseverarunt tenendam non esse festivitatem [cujus primordia Romane ecclesie non habent auctoritatem. Quos me rationabiliter refellente et eis secundum maliciam eorum respondente, multi testimonium perhibuerunt quoniam in hoc regno et in transmarinis partibus a nonnullis episcopis et abbatibus in ecclesiis Dei celebris instituta est illius diei recordatio, de cujus summa redemptionis nostre salutari processit exordio. . . . Et quia controversie scismata facientium, scandala moventium, heretice garrientium, obstruende sunt in domo Dei catholica veritate et ecclesiastica defensione fidelium, ad hoc tendit stilus meus ut cum talibus religiosis personis et litteratis de hac invidorum calumnia et genitricis Dei conceptione gloriosa vel scripto vel verbo loquamini, qui et subtilia sancte scripture argumenta non ignorent et vobiscum defendere contra inimicos veritatis causam beate virginis

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trusted councillor and minister) and Saint David's (Bernard had been Queen Matilda's chaplain). The celebration it was desired to put a stop to would accordingly be that of 8th December 1127; the letter probably would be written no long time after.

Next, it is not to be supposed that, had Saint Anselm, the archbishop, actually prescribed the observance of the feast, even in the single church

Marie non formident]. Et quia dominus et pater noster Gillebertus Dei gratia Lundoniensis episcopus vir admodum catholicus de his est sufficientur instructus, et vir vite venerabilis domnus Hugo abbas Radingensis, qui hanc festivitatem prece etiam regis Henrici solenniter celebrat, in divinis et humanis est liberaliter edoctus, hortor ut cum eis de hac eadem re sermonem instituat, et ut eos coadjutores et cooperatores habeatis [ne de vobis dictum ironice a vestris inimicis audiatis: Quia hic homo cepit edificare et non potuit consummare. Hec iccirco dixerim quia vos edificium tante solennitatis incepistis et vos perficite; quodque per vos consummandum est fideliter explete. Cumque usu atque experimento consuetudines Romane noveritis ecclesie si quid aliquando in ea dignum auctoritate de hac genitricis Dei veneranda conceptione vel potuit vel poterit inveniri, per vos nobis petimus revelari].

of Canterbury, Osbert would have been silent on the point. Had such been the case what would have been more natural in writing to the nephew than to bid him complete the work of his uncle, to whom the younger Anselm had been bound by every tie of gratitude and affection, and appeal to the holy archbishop's memory in urging his requests? But Osbert's words are: "*You* have spread the feast; do you complete what *you* began."

Again, it is evident that at that time the question of the feast was no hole-and-corner affair. There were two parties, each with influential adherents. Though the answer of the bishops when appealed to did not amount to an actual prohibition, the action of the monks at Westminster must have seemed something like a challenge, if not defiance. The matter was public, and both parties would probably desire a settlement one way or the other. The preferences of the King (who had a great share in managing the course

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of things in the council of 1129) were sufficiently declared ; the new bishop of London, who then stood without a rival in Christendom as a ripe and learned theologian, could be relied on to take the same side ; at the time of his elevation to the episcopate he was canon of Lyons,\* and, from what Osbert says of him, it would seem not impossible that he may have already had a hand in establishing the feast in that church. What more likely than, as the outcome of the conferences initiated by Abbot Anselm, it should have been determined to seize the opportunity of the council of 1129 to bring the matter to an issue ? Osbert and his friends were hardly likely to find again so favourable an opportunity for the establishment of their views ; the King would frown down one sort of opposition, and Bishop Gilbert with his learning and re-

\* " Quidam ecclesiae Lugdunensis canonicus vir probus et grandaevus," says the continuator of Florence of Worcester, ed. Thorpe, ii. 89. For Gilbert generally see Wright, *Biographia Brit. Lit.* ii. 103-4.



pute could bear down heavily upon another.

It is certain that from this time the feast spread rapidly in England, and in this country at least we hear of no further objections raised to it. In view of all the circumstances we are disposed to think that, although recorded in the Tewkesbury annals alone, the confirmation of the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin by the council of London of 1129 is a fact.

Osbert's letter suggests these further considerations :

1. No reference is made in it to the observance of the feast in England previous to the Conquest. But this silence can be explained. The Normans in coming into England were disposed to treat in a contemptuous fashion enough both English liturgical observances and English saints and relics ; to them the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin must have appeared specifically English, a product of insular simplicity and ignorance. Doubtless

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its public celebration was abolished at Winchester and Canterbury, but it did not die out of the hearts of individuals ; the memory was kept up, and on the first favourable opportunity the feast was re-established in the monasteries again, as in them it had had its rise.

2. It is well to note the cautious expression of Osbert, who was apt to make the most of things that told in his own favour : “ in hoc regno et in partibus transmarinis a *nonnullis* episcopis et abbatibus in ecclesiis Dei celebris instituta est illius diei recordatio.”

3. It is not improbable that this very letter may have given rise later to the idea that the institution of the feast was to be attributed to Anselm the saint instead of his nephew. There is every likelihood, however, that the archbishop, as has been suggested, may have been at least the ultimate cause of its establishment at Lyons, the first church to adopt it, so far as appears, on the Continent. At Canterbury he must

have known those who remembered to have kept the solemnity in former days ; and he did not share in the prejudice of most of his friends and compeers against English saints and ways. The younger Anselm inherited this spirit of his uncle, so that, according to Eadmer, the native English came to look on him as one of themselves ; and Osbert, urging his return to England from a journey, writes : “ Redi ad *patriam*, te omnes suspiramus,” etc.

It remains to add such notices as have occurred of the establishment of the Feast of the Conception in English churches in the first half of the twelfth century.

1. For *Westminster* and

2. *Reading* see above : in or before 1127.

3. From a note in one of the *St Edmundsbury* cartularies we learn that Abbot Anselm established it in his own monastery, therefore between 1121-48. \*

\* This note is in a fourteenth-century hand, but it is drawn from good memoirs. The

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4. Abbot Geoffrey (1119-46) at *Saint Albans* ordered the feast to be celebrated *in cappis*. This at St Albans was a feast of the highest grade. \*

5. Abbot William Godeman seems to have introduced it at *Gloucester* (1113-31). †

following is the material part :—" Anselmus abbas ortus fuit in Longobardia et monachus monasterii sancti Michaelis quod Clusa vocatur effectus, et post ad Angliam ductus, etc. . . . Erat autem familiarissimus summis pontificibus maxime Pascali, Calixto, Innocencio, Lucio et Eugenio ut privilegia ab eis data testantur, et omnem dignitatem et honorem pontificis preter hec que sine unctione olei non possunt fieri illum decreverunt habere, scilicet anulum, mitram et sandalia. Hic Anselmus duas apud nos solemnitates instituit, scilicet conceptionem sancte Marie que jam in multis ecclesiis per ipsum celebriter observatur, et commemorationem ejus in adventu quam Hildephonsus episcopus instituit ; et cotidie unam missam de ea, et post canonicas horas alias in honore ejus celebrandas decrevit." (Harl. MS. 1005, ff. 207-8.)

\* *Gesta abb.* ed. Riley, i. 93. The feast is in the calendar of the *Saint Albans* breviary, MS. Reg. 2 A. x., which, from the mention of Saint Giles' feast as only *in albis*, seems to have been written before Abbot Geoffrey's death.

† "Istius vero tempore coepit primum celebrari apud nos in Anglia solemnitatis

6. It was first celebrated in the abbey of *Winchcombe* in the year 1126.\*

7. At *Worcester* Cathedral at some time after 1125. Among Osbert's letters is one addressed to Warinus, dean of Worcester,† accompanying a sermon drawn up by him at Warin's request on the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, "to excite in the minds of the hearers a greater alacrity in the celebration of so great and joyous a festival." ‡ From this it may be

conceptionis beatae genetricis Mariae" (Hist. Mon. S. Petri Gloucestriae, ed. Hart, i. 15). This is not absolutely cogent proof for *Gloucester*.

\* The older *Winchcombe* annals, Cotton MS. Tib. E. iv., at 1126: "Ipso anno primum cepit celebrari apud nos solennitas conceptionis sancte Marie" (cf. Faustina, B. i. fol. 14b). The feast occurs in the *Winchcombe* calendar, of about the middle of the twelfth century, in the same Tiberius MS.

† Warinus seems to have been monastic dean; the later deans mentioned in the *Worcester* annals are secular priests. He is probably identical with the Warinus among the Worcester community in the *Durham Liber Vitae*, p. 14, col. 3.

‡ The following portions of the letter are

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concluded that the feast was already at the date of the letter established at Worcester. He says that he was encouraged by the favourable reception accorded to the lessons for the feast of Saint Anne, which (as appears from another letter, to Bishop Simon of Worcester) he had been asked to write by Dean Warin and Bishop Simon when they were all three attending the funeral of an abbot of Pershore.\* Unfortunately,

of interest ; the words in brackets have been omitted by Anstruther p. 156):—"Rogasti me pater Warine venerabilis decane Wigorniensis ecclesie ut aliquid scribendo tibi de conceptione beatissime ac perpetue virginis Marie deberem innuere quod [ad celebranda tante festivitatis gaudia animos posset audientium alacrius incitare]"—his incompetence ; his belief on the subject. "Desinant ergo infideles et heretici de hac sancta solennitate in sua vanitate multiplicia loqui (*cf.* the "vanæ ineptias" of his London adversaries above, note p. 25) et discant quia filii matris gratie non de actu peccati celebritatem faciunt sed de primitiis redemptionis nostre] *sermonem tibi transmitto* qualicunque vulgari lima minus decenter artificiali decore politum. . . . [Vale pater in Christo et sancte novitatis incudem aggredi solenniter tali ne pigriteris exordio]." (MS. Vitellius A. xvii., ff. 98-9.)

\* Cotton MS. Vitellius A. xvii., f. 45 *et sqq.*

the series of abbots at Pershore is very imperfect (jumping from 1102 to 1138), and does not help us to the date.\* But there is another matter, bringing us back to the Helsin legend, which must not be passed over here. Immediately after the letter to Warin there is in the MS. a piece entitled "*De Conceptione sancte Marie qualiter primo celebrandi habuit initium*," and thereon follows—the Helsin legend. Here, then, it may be supposed we have the author. But a little attention throws much doubt on that point, for it will be found that, though the imitation is fairly good, the title has been altered by a later hand (the last five words being added), which has erased the last lines of this page

This piece is a highly curious document for the cultus of Saint Anne, whose feast seems to have been kept at Worcester with an octave; the bishop supplied a pittance on the day, the dean on the octave.

\* The entry in the Worcester annals at 1125: "*Conceptio beatae Mariae primo celebratur in Anglia*" (ed. Luard. iv. 377) can hardly by any possibility, however, refer to its introduction into that church.

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(folio 99b) and inserted two new folios (100 and 101); writing over the space thus gained the Helsin legend, which finishes so as to leave just room enough on the second inserted folio (101) to copy what had been erased on 99b, and with folio 102 the original hand of the MS. resumes. The interpolater is probably of the twelfth century ; but what Osbert really sent to Worcester is the piece fol. 101b-109b, made up of pious generalities in his tumid style, without any mention of Helsin whatever, and entitled "Item sermo de Conceptione sancte Marie." It would be interesting to know how the case stands with the Gale MS. at Trinity College, Cambridge. But it may be permitted to remark here and now (1) on the absence of any mention in documents *certainly* penned by Osbert of this "superna revelatio," which would have been most convenient for his purpose ; (2) that the source of the note in the Exchequer Ramsey cartulary as to Abbot Helsin's in-



stitution of the feast is this narrative itself; (3) that the *old* Ramsey history (the Stowe MS. is the only one we have been able to consult) has a great gap from the point where Gale's print leaves off to the accession of Abbot Walter, and, therefore, further information on the subject is not to be expected from it.

To sum up, rather *conjectando* than *affirmando*, though we think the facts adduced would warrant a more positive tone:

1. The Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin seems to have originated in England,\* and specifically among the monks of Winchester.

2. It was prevalent and firmly

\* The celebration at Naples, or rather its occurrence in the marble calendar, is a mere isolated appearance; it was not a living germ. Until more trustworthy evidence is forthcoming for Spain we may acquiesce in the words of Leslie: "Festivitas ista ignota erat Gotho-hispanis; eam a Gallis suscepisse videntur Mozarabes quorum more die viii. Decembris in Missali et in Breviario colitur" (*Missale mixtum dictum Mozarabes ab Alex. Lesleo, 1755, p. 609*).

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established before the Conquest, when it suffered some eclipse.

3. Saint Anselm probably became familiarised with it here, and although he may have contributed indirectly to its institution at Lyons he did not prescribe its observance in England.

4. Its revival is mainly due to the influence of the younger Anselm, and was formally sanctioned by a council of English bishops in the year 1129.

5. The current story in regard to Abbot Helsin of Ramsey, though it eventually found its way into several breviaries,\* is in the highest degree doubtful.

\* That of which Langebek prints the lessons is monastic; the Helsin story seems also to be given in the Schleswig breviary. Jos. Sim. Assemanus mentions (*Kal. Eccl. Univ.* v. 440 *et seq.*) a breviary of about A.D. 1300 in the archives of Saint Peter's, and another in the Vatican Library, once belonging to Matthias Corvinus, with the same lessons. They also occur in a MS. breviary of the Congregation of Saint Justina of Padua, saec. xv., *penes nos*.

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